PORTABLE CONTAINER

The present invention relates to a portable container and more particularly to a portable case for carrying tools.

Most chefs and professional cooks possess their own specialist kitchen tools such as knives, which need to be transported between venues. In addition, the tools need to be securely stored yet readily accessible when needed. Storage is frequently a problem due to limited space. A further problem encountered by many chefs and cooks is back pain caused by preparing food on work surfaces which are too low.

The present invention seeks to overcome or reduce one or more of the above problems.

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a portable container for carrying one or more tools, the container having an outer surface provided with means for retaining a work surface thereon.

The term tools is intended to include utensils, instruments and implements.

Preferably, the means for retaining comprises one or more raised members. The raised members are advantageously positioned at or adjacent the periphery of the outer surface.

Preferably, the raised members are moveable along the outer surface of the container. The raised members may be detachable. Alternatively, the raised members may be fixed. For example, the raised members may be integral with the outer surface.

Advantageously, the raised members are plurality of flanges and/or pins.

At least a part of the container may be made of plastics material, a light weight metal and/or wood.

Preferably, the container has a second opposed outer surface having non-slip means.

The inside of the container preferably has means for retaining one or more tools. The means for retaining tools may include a moulded tray, magnetic material and/or one or more clips.

The work surface is typically a chopping board.

According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a kit of parts comprising a portable container for carrying tools having an outer surface provided with means for retaining a work surface thereon; a work surface for retention on the outer surface of the container, and a set of tools for storing inside the container.

Preferably the work surface can be stored inside the container.

Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings of which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a portable case in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the case of Figure 1 when opened;

Figure 3 is a top plan view of the case of Figure 1; and

Figure 4 is a bottom plan view of the case of Figure 1.

Figure 5 is a perspective view of a modified portable case.

Figure 6 is a perspective view of part of a portable case in accordance with an alternative embodiment of the present invention.

Referring to the Figures 1 to 4, a portable case 100 is made of plastics material and has a shallow base tray 102 for storing kitchen utensils and cutlery. One end of the base 102 is connected to a lid 104 by a hinge 105. The lid 104 is an inverted shallow tray of the same dimensions as the base 102. Thus items placed in the base 102 which are greater depth than the base can be accommodated. The height of the case 100 when laid flat is approximately 102mm (4 inches).

The front sides of the base 102 and lid 104 each have a handle element 110 arranged such that when the case 100 is shut, they effectively form a single handle member which can be held in one hand. A lock 112 is provided on each side of the handles.

The top surface of the lid 104 has four peripheral flanges 114, one on each side of the lid, for retaining a chopping board having approximate dimensions 510mm x 360mm x 254mm (18 inches x 12 inches x 1 inch). The flanges 114 are integral with the lid 104.

A ridged rubber mat 118 is inlaid substantially in the centre of the outer surface of the base 102.

In use, a chef can store his kitchen utensils inside the case 100 and transport them between venues. Most kitchens supply chopping boards, which tend to be colour coded for use with different foodstuffs, and thus the chef does not need to transport boards between venues. In the kitchen, the case 100 is laid flat on a work bench. The chef selects a chopping board and places it on top of the lid 104 so that it is held in position by the retaining flanges 114. He can then begin to prepare food on the chopping board. The non-slip mat 118 on the base 102 prevents the case 100 moving accidentally. The case 100 can be readily opened and closed when access to the stored utensils is needed. The flanges 114 prevent the chopping board slipping off the case 100 when it is opened. When the chef has finished using the chopping board it can be readily removed, the gaps 116 between the flanges 114 allowing easy access to the board.

An advantage of the above-described case is that it provides a compact, portable work station which is easy to transport. Furthermore, it provides a raised work surface which

increases the comfort of the user. It can be used with standard sized chopping boards which are found in most kitchens. Another advantage is that the chopping board is held in place, preventing substantial accidental movement. Since the tools are stored in the case which is under the raised work surface, they are easily accessible. In addition, the case can be easily and cheaply manufactured.

Numerous variations to the case are possible.

Referring to Figure 5, a modified case 200 has a lid 202 and base tray 204. The lid 20 is an inverted tray of the same dimensions as the base 204. Each tray 202, 204 comprises walls 208, 210 extending from a substantially planar surface. Thus when the lid 202 is closed the walls 208 of the lid are in contact with the walls 210 of the base tray 204. An aluminium extrusion 212 is provided substantially around the edges of the lid walls 208 which are in contact with the base tray. Similarly, an aluminium extrusion 214 is provided substantially around the upper edge of the base tray walls 210. Accordingly, when the lid 202 is closed over the base tray 204, the aluminium extrusions 212, 214 contact each other. Extrusion 212 has male connectors (not shown) which join with female connectors (not shown) on extrusion 214 when the case is closed. The top surface of the lid 202 has four flanges 206 which are adjacent the periphery of the lid 202.

An advantage of this arrangement is that the extrusions 212, 214 add strength and rigidity to the case and enable the case to be simply fastened.

Alternatively, the extrusions 212, 214 may be any suitable metal or plastic.

The case may be larger in order to retain a larger chopping board, for example 24 inches x 18 inches (610mm x 510mm). The case can retain polyethylene chopping boards which typically have a depth of 0.5 to 1 inch (127mm to 254mm).

The height of the case when laid flat may be in the range of about 4 to 8 inches (102mm to 203mm). The height of case used will depend on the height of the user and will be selected to limit back strain.

The peripheral flanges may not be provided on all four sides of the lid. Instead, there may be two flanges on opposite sides of the lid, preferably on the front and back sides so that the board does not slip off when the case is opened. This arrangement could hold a work surface which is longer than the case.

The flanges may not be integral but may be attached to the lid in another way for example by bonding.

The flanges may be moveable to accommodate a range of chopping boards of different sizes.

The flanges may be releasable for transporting prior to first use or during long periods of non-use.

The flanges may be adapted to grip the board so that the case can be picked up and carried with the board held firmly in place. There may be slots, for example, to receive a board. The board may snap-fit into place. The board may be secured in position by clips. The clips may be pivotally mounted on the case.

Instead of flanges, there may be a continuous raised rim substantially around the perimeter of the lid. However, it is more difficult to remove the board from such an arrangement.

Other retaining members may be used. Referring to Figure 6, a portable case 300 has a lid with an upper surface 302 for retaining a chopping board. Each corner of the upper surface 302 has a plurality of holes 304 each for receiving a removable pin 306. The pins are inserted into selected holes 304 depending upon the size of the chopping board to be retained. Two pins are positioned at each corner of the surface 302.

Holes may be provided substantially around the periphery of the case. Two pins, on opposite sides of the surface would be enough to position a board, although four pins (one on each side) are preferred since they permit improved retention of a board.

The pins may be provided in different heights to retain boards of different thickness. Alternatively, the pins may be height adjustable.

The pins may be metal, plastic and/or wood. They may be fixed and may be integral with the upper surface of the lid.

The lid of the case may have one or more reinforcing struts. This is particularly useful for supporting heavy work surfaces. The struts may be metal. The struts may be located within the moulding of the lid such that they can not be seen. Alternatively, the struts may be integral with the lid and formed in the same moulding operation. This arrangement may mean that the lid is less deep than the base.

The lid may not be an inverted tray, and may be substantially flat. The lid may not be hinged and may be attached in any other way.

The case may be made of a light metal such as aluminium, or wood.

Any non-slip material may be applied to the base of the case. Instead of a mat, the base of the case may have non-slip feet. Alternatively, the non-slip material may be omitted.

The case may have any type of suitable lock, for example a combination or key lock or latches.

The inside of the case may be provided with equipment retainers for holding different sized utensils. For example, there may be a moulded tray and/or there may be a magnetic lining, layer or strip to retain the utensils. Alternatively, there may be clips.

The case may have a shoulder strap to facilitate carrying.

The case may be used for a variety of purposes with any kind of tools. For example, a joiner or carpenter would carry tools such as hammers, screwdrivers and the like. A doctor

would carry instruments and medicines. An artist would carry brushes, pencils, paints and the like.

The outside of the case may be adapted to retain different work surfaces, such as wood, metal card, paper and the like.

The work surface may not be flat and may have recesses and indents or the like. For example, a joiner or carpenter may use a work surface which is rough to prevent items slipping. This is particularly important when carrying out a delicate operation. The work surface may have holders for the joiner's tools. An artist may use a work surface with indents for filling with paints. A doctor may use a work surface with recesses for holding medicine containers.

The work surface could be a display surface. For example, a salesman may wish to display samples or pictures of products.

One or more work surfaces may be carried inside the case and then transferred to the top of the case for use. An advantage of this arrangement is that it provides a clean, hygienic work surface. This is particularly advantageous for medical use in the field. The arrangement is also beneficial to chefs travelling to a venue which may not provide chopping boards. The chef can clean his board (s) at home and transport it to the venue inside the case so that it remains clean.